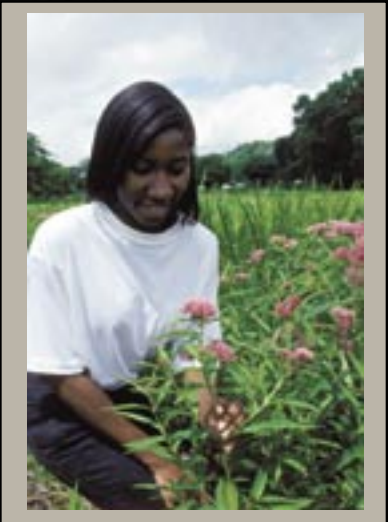
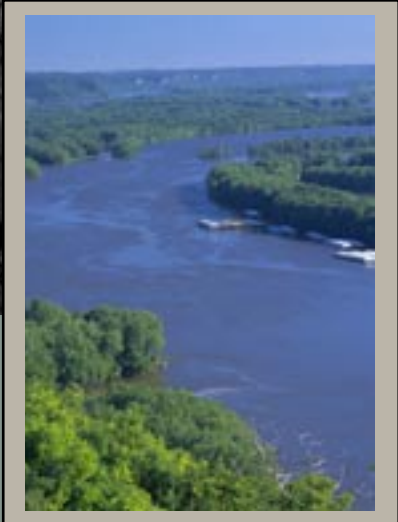
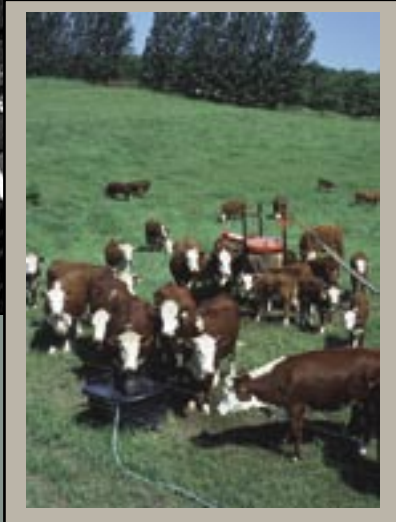
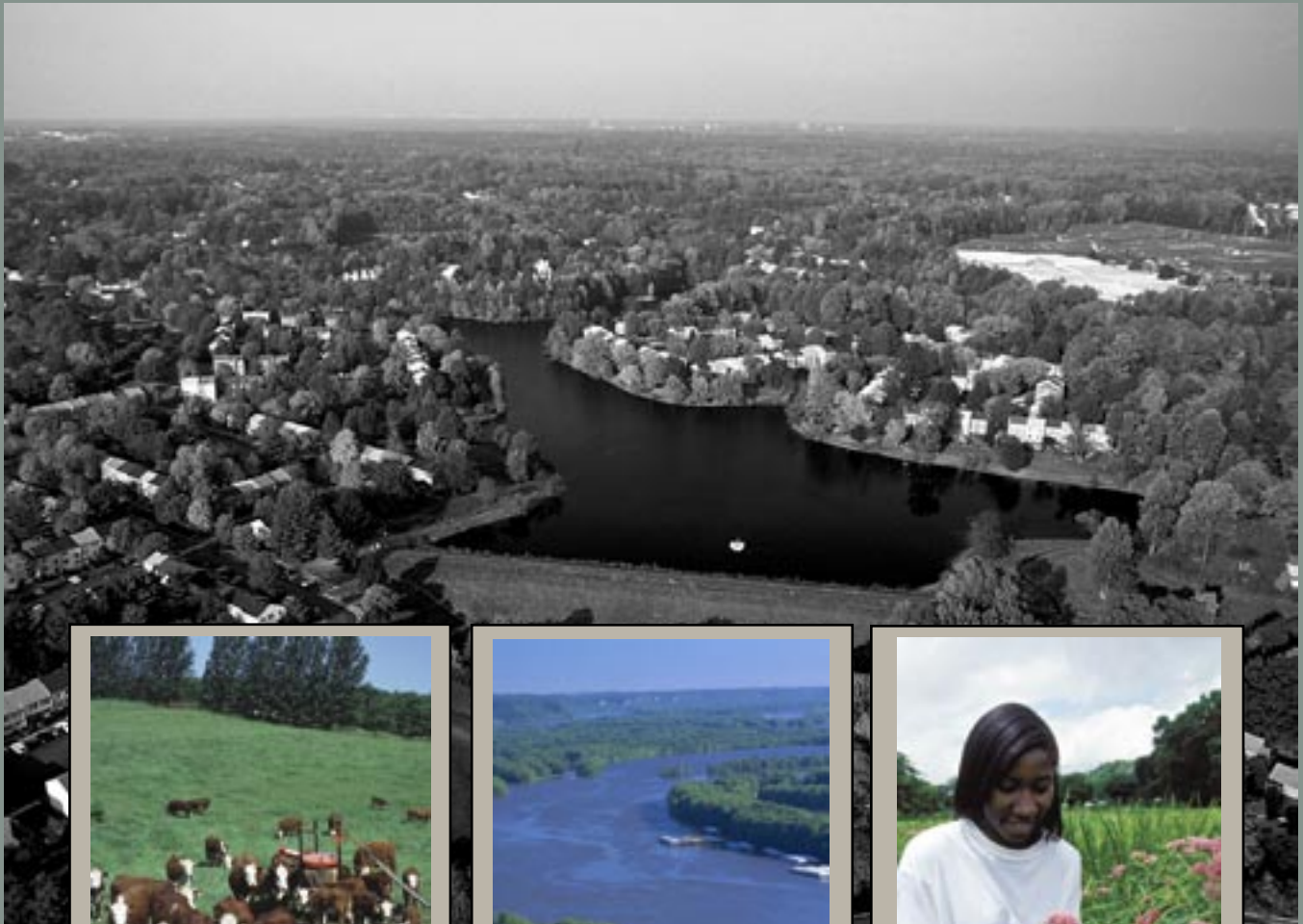


United States Department of Agriculture



2001 Midwest Region Report Natural Resources Conservation Activities



Land, Water, People

NRCS rated #1 Federal Agency for Customer Service



**Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service**

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The recipients of conservation technical assistance gave Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) a very high customer satisfaction rating in the recent American Customer Satisfaction Index. NRCS and conservation district employees take pride in the job they do in serving their customers. Farmers and ranchers have come to expect good service in getting conservation technical assistance. Now, NRCS and conservation districts face the challenge of preparing for customers' future expectations.

This has been a very successful year for partnerships in the Midwest Region. Our dedication and perseverance has paid off through groups meeting to discuss and take action on conservation issues. We remain committed to working with individuals, groups, and others who want to conserve, maintain, and improve the natural resources and environment.

This report highlights the continued success the eight-state region has had with natural resource issues. While much has been accomplished, there remains more to be done. We look forward to future challenges and opportunities with the 2002 Farm Bill.

Charles Whitmore
Regional Conservationist
Midwest Region

The Midwest Region

Overview

The Midwest Region encompasses an area of roughly 293 million acres. The eight states within the region include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin; and is home for more than 57 million people. The landscape of the region is dominated by cultivated cropland accounting for more than 116 million acres or 40 percent of the total Midwest acreage. Pasture and rangeland accounts for more than 29 million acres. Forestlands make up more than 84 million acres (excluding federal lands).

The Region also contains all or part of two very large and important river basins - the Upper Mississippi River Basin (UMRB) and the Great Lakes Basin.

- In 1986, the UMRB was designated by Congress as both a nationally significant ecosystem and navigational system. It is a direct link for five Midwest states to the Gulf of Mexico.

- The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA), signed in 1972, established a joint,

binational commitment by the U.S. and Canada to restore and maintain integrity of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem. The Basin holds major urbanized areas that are home to more than 33 million people who rely on the Great Lakes watershed as a source of drinking water.



Who we are...NRCS

NRCS employees work in every county in the Midwest Region. They are resource conservationists, soil conservationists, engineers, biologists, agronomists, and soil scientists who work hand-in-hand with land users to conserve natural resources on private lands.

This is the foundation of our conservation programs, and we are committed to providing training and support to meet the changing challenges in natural resources management.

NRCS Mission

"The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment."

NRCS Vision

A Productive Nation in Harmony with a Quality Environment



Illinois

www.il.nrcs.usda.gov

Indiana

www.in.nrcs.usda.gov

Iowa

www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov

Michigan

www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov

Minnesota

www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov

Missouri

www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov

Ohio

www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov

Wisconsin

www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov

Partnerships for Good Stewardship

- In 2001, conservation partnerships were successful in the Midwest Region. NRCS's partnership investment in the **Upper Mississippi River Basin (UMRB) Stewardship Initiative** began to yield extremely significant dividends. Work on the Initiative, by St. Mary's University (MN), began to gain recognition with conservation stakeholders across the Basin and in Congress. Legislation was written in the Basin and debated in the 106th and 107th Congress. Funding and stakeholder advisory concepts for managing public investments in conservation, first proposed in the Stewardship Initiative, are still being debated in the context of the 2002 Farm Bill. In addition, St. Mary's University also completed several conservation success stories depicting conservation results for five Basin states (Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin).

- NRCS policy on **Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils**. American Indian Tribes in half of the Region's states formed Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils to better advise NRCS about conservation and resource development needs. Some have formed a state-wide Tribal Conservation Advisory Council that is meeting regularly to advise NRCS of their needs. Individual tribes in some states have agreed to act as the statewide Tribal Conservation Advisory Council. Many tribes in the Midwest have begun to forward tribal conservation plans to the Secretary of Agriculture and Congress and have begun asking for policy adjustments to provide better service to tribes.

- The **"Working Landscapes Conference: Creating Sustainable Futures For Agriculture, Forestry, and Communities,"** a major non-traditional partnership conference, was held in the region. Sponsored by over 40 public and private sector partners and more than 220 participants and speakers attended. The marketing strategy included traditional and non-traditional stakeholders such as: agriculture, limited resource farmers, League of Women Voters, newspapers, minorities, NACD, RC&Ds, garden clubs, associations for mayors, townships, counties, developers, wildlife planners, outdoor writers, universities, and tribes among others.

- NRCS also participates in the Federal Great Lakes Cleanup Program by providing funds to the States, Tribes and local organizations through the **Great Lakes Commission (GLC)**. Since 1994, the GLC has distributed \$3.45 million to special projects for erosion control in the Great Lakes Basin.

In addition, NRCS has provided staff to work on Great Lakes Water Quality coordination and serve as liaison to US EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office.



Smart Growth Planning Program

NRCS selected the City and Town of Brillion, Wisconsin as one of two national pilot projects for the Smart Growth Planning Program. Smart Growth is a process to quantify and qualify a community's landscape for better, more informed planning and development. This is a partnership between the University of Wisconsin-Madison Land Information and Computer Graphics Facility and the NRCS Regional Office to provide the pilot projects with the tools and information needed to help communities develop smart growth plans.

Smart Growth supports existing communities by targeting resources to enhance development in areas where the infrastructure is already in place or planned. It is intended to also save taxpayers millions of dollars in unnecessary costs for infrastructure development. NRCS will provide planning and mapping services. The planning program used will serve as a model for other communities across the country.

Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

NRCS has been designated as the lead agency in implementing the Farmland Protection Program. They partner with State, Tribal, and local governments or nongovernmental organizations to acquire conservation easements from landowners. Participating landowners choose to keep their land in agriculture and agree not to convert the land for nonagricultural use. Landowners retain all rights to use the property for agriculture and must have a conservation plan developed based on the standards in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.

The goal of the program is to protect between 170,000 and 340,000 acres. Nationally, 108,161 acres have been acquired or pending. In the Midwest, four states are participating in FPP; Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin. To date, 2,924 acres have been acquired and 2,013 acres pending. In 2001, one easement was acquired with 156 acres, 8 easements are pending with 1,777 acres.





Water Resources

Protecting and enhancing the vast and abundant water resources that are present in the Midwest Region continues to be a high priority for the conservation partnership. Non-point source contamination of water remains one of the most significant challenges facing agriculture today.

The magnitude of cropland and livestock production will continue to keep agriculture as a potential contributor to impairment of water resources.

During 2001, NRCS and their partners worked with agricultural producers to address potential water quality concerns from excessive erosion and sedimentation from the region's cropland. Resource Management Systems (RMS) were applied to over 2.5 million acres of cropland. In addition, almost another million acres of highly erodible cropland was protected against excessive erosion. As a result of these actions, erosion and sedimentation was reduced, thus having a positive impact in water quality in the region.

Significant water quality improvements were also realized from the conservation work completed during 2001 with livestock producers throughout the region. Proper manure management (including storage, handling, and application) is a significant workload, with an estimated 108,500 livestock operations needing assistance. During 2001, an estimated 1,660 wet and dry waste management systems were planned and applied. In addition, proper nutrient management was applied on 1.2 million acres of cropland. These conservation practices are assisting livestock producers to address nutrient management issues from livestock manure.



Soil Resources

The Midwest Region is the beneficiary of abundant soil resources for growing crops and plants. In a region where 116 million

acres are cropland, resource management practices are important to reduce runoff from water. The region is also vulnerable to wind erosion. Soil erosion not only effects plant growth and economics for landowners, but also has substantial effect on the quality of our water supplies and the air. Significant reductions of soil erosion have occurred in the past 15 years due to conservation efforts from private landowners. NRCS works with landowners to help them determine the right practice for their land.

Loss of farmland to development continues to have impact on the region. Five states - Michigan, Ohio, Minnesota, Missouri, and Illinois - rank among the top 25 list of states nationally. More than 1.9 million acres of the regions cropland, forestland, and other open space were converted to urban development from 1992 to 1997 (*1997 National Resource Inventory*). The conversion of agriculture land to other uses results in the fragmentation of agricultural land, the loss of family farms, the disappearance of historical landscapes, and the loss of open space and places of beauty. Once this productive land is developed, it may be lost forever.

Soil survey is a tool produced to assist landowners, builders, and developers in proper land management. Published soil surveys contain, in addition to soil maps, general information about the agriculture and climate of the area and descriptions of each kind of soil. Surveys are used for planning farms, engineering structures, parks, urban developments, and other uses of land. During 2001, over 6.3 million acres in the region were mapped for current soil surveys. The kinds of interpretations in these surveys include:

- Estimated yields of the common agricultural crops under defined levels of management
- Forestland and woodland interpretations
- Engineering uses of soils
- Interpretations for community planning
- Suitability of the soil for drainage and irrigation
- Suitability of the soil for wildlife and recreation



People Resources

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) continues to be one of the most successful rural development programs. In 2001, seven new RC&D areas were approved bringing a total of 69 areas in the Midwest

Region. The RC&D Council coordinates and facilitates projects to develop and implement solutions that will help sustain rural communities, local economies, and natural resources. The value of RC&D projects is estimated at \$10-\$12 is generated locally for every RC&D program dollar invested. Following are examples of how RC&D has helped communities:

- RC&D assisted a community left economically devastated by the decline of their tourism business. The Council wrote a grant proposal and was funded to implement a project that renewed their tourism industry almost immediately.
- RC&D council coordinated the formation of an inter-governmental entity to provide a way for small communities in rural locations to establish needed community facilities and services, such as affordable wastewater treatments systems.
- RC&D council worked with another USDA agency to create a revolving loan fund to serve as a catalyst to improve the economic growth and employment of the area. Through these loans to companies, 32 full time jobs were created.

NRCS in the region consists of a Regional Office, 8 state offices and 652 field offices. All offices work with State, Tribal and local conservation partners and other resource agencies. NRCS employees provide technical assistance to private landowners to help them protect natural resources. In 2001, funding for technical assistance was \$125.1 million. Those dollars allowed NRCS employees to assist private land owners with conservation efforts. An additional \$63.8 million supported in plant materials, water resources, emergency work, Farm Bill programs, soil technology, and RC&D.